



# **CAPTivations**

## **Success Stories in Prevention**

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### ***The Oaks SICA at McAlester (OK)***

From street dances to establishing smoke-free baseball fields, The Oaks SICA (State Incentive Cooperative Agreement) is working with local coalitions to reduce alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use in McAlester and surrounding Pittsburg County in Oklahoma. The Oaks SICA has even counter-sponsored a rodeo event for children, to keep big tobacco out of it, said Jennifer Bolt, executive director.

"The rodeo is big here, so smokeless tobacco is big here," Bolt notes. "Some people think it's cool to give it to a four-year-old to try. These are the norms we're trying to change."

McAlester, a town of about 18,000, is home to a maximum security state prison, as well as a hospital, a junior college, and an industrial park, which provides jobs to the surrounding communities, including Krebs, and the "Twin Cities" of Haileyville and Hartshorne.

Pittsburg County has numerous organizations, such as Kiwanis and the Lions Clubs, and a number of coalitions working with issues ranging from domestic violence to child abuse, Bolt said. But the area has little for the youth to do, and consequently has a high rate of alcohol, tobacco, and methamphetamine use.

"Kids often have 'rig parties,' where they go to abandoned (oil) rig sites and have keg parties," Bolt points out.

The Oaks SICA is operating under a three-year state grant from the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services which runs until 2004.

The Oaks SICA is providing technical assistance to a committee in Haileyville and Hartshorne which is trying to start up a Twin Cities Youth Center to give youth a place to go and do things. The committee has obtained non-profit status and is looking for land which can be donated to build a center. In the meantime, the committee held daily activities over the summer at the National Guard Armory in Hartshorne and in the Civic Center in

Haileyville and is holding monthly activities in the two locations during the school year. Over the summer, the center attracted an average of 42 children per day, as well as individual and business volunteers.

Another event The Oaks SICA started was an alcohol, tobacco, and drug-free street dance in front of the Haileyville City Hall in May 2002. The dance was free, and the American Cancer Society sponsored a free space jump for children. The Oaks SICA, as well as The Oaks Area Prevention Resource Center (APRC), the South East Tobacco Free Oklahoma Coalition, and Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT), all set up information booths. The Haileyville Junior High and High School cheerleaders and the Twin Cities Youth Center provided concessions—the only costs to the participants of the night—and the city provided restroom facilities.

"We had about 300, 350 people who came, and this is with a graduating class of 30," Bolt observed. And, she added, it was held the same night as baseball awards ceremonies. The Oaks SICA plans to hold the dance again on a night that does not interfere with baseball.

Another measure of success, Bolt states, is that her booth alone handed out about 1,000 pieces of literature.

The Oaks SICA has sponsored several other substance-free dances, including several in Haileyville and Hartshorne for third through eighth graders. It's also helped the local 4-H club sponsor a dance in October 2002.

"We get a pretty high turnout," Bolt said. "It gives the kids and parents



something to do. We are trying to get a lot of community events going which the parents and kids can do after the grant is gone."

In responding to the need for more activities for children, Pittsburg County Oaks SICA has sponsored numerous community events. All events have an anti-substance abuse message.

For example, on National Kick Butts Day on April 3, 2002, Haileyville High School students participated in Operation Storefront. Students visited stores in Haileyville and Hartshorne area, tallying up the number of tobacco ads they saw, and asking the owners to replace the tobacco ads with anti-smoking messages. The kids were successful in getting two of the five stores to change ads, Bolt noted.

On National Kick Butts Day, Jack Vogel, a former smoker and cancer survivor, and his wife Fredonia, spoke to Krebs and McAlester students in grades three through eight about his experiences as a smoker and his battle with cancer.

Elementary school students at Krebs, McAlester, and Hartshorne also participated in a coloring contest, drawing anti-tobacco messages on posters. In Hartshorne, everyone who participated got at National Kick Butts Day sticker and temporary "tattoo," and winners also received t-shirts, hats, and sports bottles.

The posters were taken to the local grocery store and put in grocery bags, to

spread the anti-tobacco message.

The anti-tobacco message

was extended over the summer to the annual rodeo, when The Oaks SICA, along

with the South East

Tobacco Free Oklahoma Coalition, sponsored the Mutton Bustin' event. That's when kids up to age six get to ride sheep. Normally, the tobacco companies sponsor as much of the rodeo as they possibly can,

including the event for small children, but this time, the anti-tobacco groups stepped in and co-opted the sheep riding extravaganza. The tobacco ads from the lamp posts were removed and up went the anti-tobacco messages.

Hartshorne also got the anti-smoking message in the summer of 2002 when The Oaks-SICA asked the city council to make a local baseball field, used only by kids ages 3-12, smoke free. Bolt and other representatives of The Oaks-SICA testified before the council, as did representatives from the county health department, the American Cancer Society, and concerned parents.

The impetus for this move, Bolt said, came from her conversations with parents at the ballfield who were concerned about their toddlers picking up cigarette butts and putting them in their mouths.

With one abstention, the council agreed to make the ballfield smoke free.

The Oaks SICA also got the community's kids involved in a number of activities over Thanksgiving and Christmas. It worked with the 4H Club in Hartshorne to acquire and decorate a community Christmas tree in 2001. It ran ads and had children ask parents to donate decorations. The groups set up drop-off points, but most of the decorations were donated when people drove by and saw the kids trimming the tree on Main Street, Bolt said.

In addition, for Christmas 2001, The Oaks SICA got half the Hartshorne Elementary School classes to participate in the Parade of Lights, a Christmas parade that for the first time was being held at night. Each class decorated its own float, with parents, teachers, and students working together. The classes competed for best float, but the main focus, Bolt said, was to foster more parent-child involvement.

For Thanksgiving, The Oaks SICA and 4H worked with Hartshorne preschoolers through sixth grade on a food drive for local people in need of food. By the time the kids were finished donating, they had a box of canned goods, a box of dry goods, and a large turkey, each for 20 families.

"There were no prizes involved," Bolt said. "It just gave them a sense of accomplishment."

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**Resources:**

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Prevention  
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